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COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO FRESHWATER, INCLUDING CLEAN AND SAFE WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION

Draft agreed conclusions submitted by the Vice-President of the Council, Mr. Gerhard Walter Henze (Germany)

The Economic and Social Council takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on freshwater, including clean and safe water supply and sanitation (E/1997/70) and of the suggestions contained in it in order to enhance coordination and cooperation among the organizations of the United Nations system in the field of water resources.

The Economic and Social Council notes with great concern that more than one fifth of the world's population does not have access to safe drinking water and more than one half of humanity lacks adequate sanitation, and reiterates its recommendation [1] that the organizations of the United Nations system assign high priority to strengthening their activities and cooperation in these areas of endeavour.

The Economic and Social Council notes that the Commission on Sustainable Development, at its fifth session, and the General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session, looked upon water resources as an issue requiring high priority. The Council welcomes the decision of the General Assembly at its

[1] See Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/46 of 27 July 1995.

special session that, building on existing principles and instruments, arrangements and programmes of action calls for a dialogue under the aegis of the Commission on Sustainable Development, beginning at its sixth session, aimed at building a consensus on the necessary actions and, in particular, the means of implementation, and on tangible results in order to consider initiating a strategic approach for the implementation of all aspects of the sustainable use of freshwater for social and economic purposes, including, inter alia, safe drinking water and sanitation, water for irrigation, recycling and wastewater management, and the important role played by freshwater in natural ecosystems. The General Assembly further stated that this intergovernmental process would be fully fruitful only if there was a proven commitment by the international community for the provision of new and additional financial resources for the goals of the initiative. The Council stresses the importance of the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development concerning all matters related to the sustainable development of water resources.

The Economic and Social Council takes note of existing arrangements for cooperation and coordination through the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Water Resources and other arrangements among specific organizations and recommends that they take further steps towards streamlining their programme and activities. The Council urges the ACC Subcommittee to analyse in detail the activities that are currently being carried out by the organizations of the system and the interrelationship between them and to prepare a report by the end of 1997. The report would be a useful input into the preparatory process leading up to the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Council further recommends that the regional commissions take measures to enhance their participation at the sessions of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources in order to provide the necessary regional perspectives to the work of the Subcommittee.

The Economic and Social Council stresses the seriousness of the capacity-building problem in developing countries and urges the organizations of the United Nations system to assign high priority to programmes and activities geared to the provision of support in this respect. It takes note of the conclusion of the comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world, submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session (E/CN.17/1997/9), to the effect that the capability of providing

accurate water quantity and quality data is sorely lacking in the majority of countries and that, despite the existence of important programmes, international support efforts concerning information management remains fragmented and incomplete. The Council welcomes the recommendation by the General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session, to strengthen the capacity of Governments and international institutions to collect and manage information, including scientific, social and environmental data, in order to facilitate the integrated assessment and management of water resources and to foster regional and international cooperation for information dissemination and exchange through cooperative approaches among United Nations institutions, including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and centres of environmental excellence. In this regard, technical assistance to developing countries will continue to be important. The Council also considers that, owing to the lack of data in both developed and developing countries, there is a need for an update and reassessment of the water resources of the world. Given the seriousness of the situation concerning the effect of the disposal of toxic substances, including arsenic contamination of drinking water supplies, and of persistent organic pollutants upon water resources, the Council recommends that close attention be given to these issues. The work of the organizations of the United Nations system must be carried out in compliance with chapter 18 of Agenda 21 [1] and other relevant chapters contained in that document.

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[1] Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (UN publication E.93.I.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.